



Ahimsā

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The Doctrinal Evolution of Buddhism

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INTRODUCTION

Currently, Buddhism is divided into two great schools: Theravāda and Mahāyāna. In the distant past, other schools also existed, but these are the only two that have survived to the present day. Both schools originated in India, but, since the latter predominates in China, Japan, Nepal, and, in a modified form, in Tibet and Mongolia, while the former is confined almost exclusively to Myanmar (Burma), the Chittagong region of Bangladesh, Śri Lanka (Ceylon), Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos, the schools are often called “Southern Buddhism” and “Northern Buddhism”, respectively.

Mahāyāna is again divided into the traditional, or “unreformed”, branch and the so-called “new schools”. The former is found all over East Asia, while the new schools are centered in Japan.

Different scholars have spoken of Mahāyāna as a ritualistic and animistic degeneration of early Buddhism, as a sophist nihilism, and as a mystical pantheism. They have claimed that it is polytheistic, and they have also stated that it is a vast mass of contradictory ideas, unassimilated and unrefined. Rather, Mahāyāna Buddhism should be thought of as the culmination of centuries of speculative development enriched by materials from many sources and expounded by a large number of ancient metaphysicians from India, Tibet, and China, while Theravādin Buddhism has remained faithful to the original teachings of the historical Buddha.

INDIAN THOUGHT AT THE TIME OF THE BUDDHA

Any adequate understanding of the Mahāyāna must be based upon an understanding of its stages of development, of the process by which it became differentiated from the earlier forms of Buddhism, of its relationship to early Buddhism, and of the place of early Buddhism in Indian thought.

The period in which Śākyamuni Buddha, the historical founder of Buddhism, lived (some five and a half centuries BCE) was in many ways an interesting one. The earlier beliefs of the Vedas had faded, and the implicit acceptance of the primeval deities had given way, at least among the educated classes, to a keen discussion, from a mystical-rationalist point of view, of the essential problems of existence. It was the age of the formation of new metaphysical systems. Bands of wandering teachers went forth proclaiming new systems of knowledge, new outlooks on life. It may be mentioned that it was also at this time that Jainism took shape.

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Activities

The Charleston Buddhist Fellowship:

- Conducts informal seminars on Buddhism.
- Prepares and distributes free educational material.

Programs

The Charleston Buddhist Fellowship sponsors the following programs:

- Instructions in meditation.
- *Dhamma* study groups.
- Retreats (at IMC-USA).

There are no fees for any of the activities or programs offered by the organization. Seminars are designed to present basic information about Buddhism to the general public — anyone may attend. However, study groups and meditation instructions are open to members only.

Retreats last ten days and are coordinated through IMC-USA in Westminster, MD (410-346-7889). Fees are set by IMC-USA. Advance registration is required.

One-on-one discussions about one's individual practice or about Buddhism in general are also available upon request. These discussions are accorded confidential treatment. There is no fee for one-on-one discussions. ■

Purpose of the Charleston Buddhist Fellowship

The Charleston Buddhist Fellowship is an educational organization whose purpose is to preserve and promote the original teachings of the Buddha in the West.

The Charleston Buddhist Fellowship actively encourages an ever-deepening process of commitment among Westerners to live a Buddhist way of life in accordance with the original Teachings of the Buddha.

The Charleston Buddhist Fellowship provides free educational material to those who want to learn about Buddhism and about how to put the Teachings of the Buddha into practice.

The goals of the Charleston Buddhist Fellowship are:

1. To provide systematic instruction in the *Dhamma*, based primarily on Pāli sources.
2. To promote practice of the *Dhamma* in daily life.
3. To provide guidance on matters relating to the *Dhamma*, its study, and its practice.
4. To encourage the study of the Pāli language and literature.
5. To maintain close contact with individuals and groups interested in promoting and supporting the foregoing goals. ■

Dhamma Study Group

An on-going *Dhamma* study group focusing on the book *A Practice Guide to the Path of Purification* is meeting on irregular Sunday mornings at 11:00 o'clock at the home of Jason and Vanessa Widener (892 East Estates Blvd., West Ashley, SC 29414). E-mail info@charlestonbuddhistfellowship.org or call (843) 321-9190 for the date and time of the next meeting and for directions to Jason's home. The meeting schedule is also posted on the CBF web site: <http://www.charlestonbuddhistfellowship.org>. There is no fee to participate in this group. An introductory study group starts at 10:00 AM. ■

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These Indian philosophers and teachers, like their contemporaries in Greece, were primarily concerned with problems relating to (1) the nature of ultimate reality and (2) methods of ascertaining truth.

1. Just as the ancient Greek philosophers were divided into (A) a School of Naïve Realists, (B) a School of Being, and (C) a School of Becoming, so did the ancient Indians divide themselves into (A) those who adhered to the Vedic hymns and accepted the universe at its face value, (B) those who taught that the ultimate nature of things is quiescent and changeless, that beyond the world of fluctuating phenomena lies the realm of the Absolute, in which there is no space and time but only an eternal present, and (C) those who taught that change, flux, becoming, integration and disintegration, are inherent in the nature of things; that no thing ever remains the same for two consecutive moments; that even the Absolute is ever evolving and becoming.
2. As a result of these differences of outlook concerning the nature of reality, there arose widely divergent theories concerning the basis of truth:

- A. **Truth through sense impression:** In this theory, humans instinctively believe in the validity of sense impressions. All things are exactly as we see them, and absolute truth is to be gained by sensory experience.
- B. **Truth through reason:** According to this view, as the limitations of the senses come to be felt, it is recognized that the ceaseless change of the phenomenal world prevents us from obtaining insight into its nature by means of the senses. However, the School of Being represented by the *Upanishads* taught that a person's soul (*ātman*) is not of the phenomenal but of the noumenal world, that one might, through the exercise of one's mental powers, gain direct insight

into the ultimate nature of reality. This Vedānta doctrine corresponds very closely to certain phases of Plato's theory of knowledge.

- C. **Truth through psychological analysis:** While the Vedāntins (as well as Plato) were content to accept the validity of reason, supported, no doubt, by the seeming absolute nature of mathematics, the Indian School of Becoming came to regard the mind, not as an independent, eternal, and unconditioned entity having a direct insight into truth, but, rather, as a limited, caused, confined, and conditioned organism whose data are of purely relative value. Acute analysis of the functions of consciousness no doubt aided this conception, and the conflicting nature of all reasoning seemed to support it. In spite of age-long disputes, no single rational doctrine could claim universal acceptance.

Consequently, only the immediate data of consciousness could claim assured validity. We have no means of ascertaining whether or not these data correspond to ultimate reality or are logically consistent, but, of the reality of feelings in and of themselves, there can be no doubt.

PRIMITIVE BUDDHISM

Primitive Buddhism, so far as we can judge its doctrines by means of the critical analysis of the various recensions of the *Sutta/Sūtra Piṭaka*, was the quintessential example of the philosophy of the Indian School of Becoming. Change (*anicca*) was the foundation on which its philosophy rested. The body (*kāya*) was considered a living complex organism, possessing no self-nature (*anattā*). The nature of the mind was analogous — impermanent and lacking self-nature. The percipient consciousness had no direct insight into truth but was merely a compound produced by the chain of causality and conditioned by its environment.

Therefore, at the outset, Buddhism assumed an

agnostic position regarding certain metaphysical problems. “These problems the Blessed One has left unexplained, has set aside, has rejected — whether the world is eternal or not eternal; whether the world is finite or infinite; whether the life-principle is the same as the body or the life-principle is one thing and the body is another; whether the Tathāgata exists or does not exist after death; whether the Tathāgata both exists and does not exist after death; whether the Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death.”

In a word, primitive Buddhism insisted that we can only deal with facts and data of which we are immediately conscious as they unfold before us; with states of consciousness; with the analysis of the emotions; and with the universe as perceived as opposed to the universe as it is.

The doctrines of primitive Buddhism are all in agreement with this psychological basis, as may be seen by examining its theory of the Three Characteristic Marks of all mental and physical phenomena and the Four Noble Truths.

The Three Characteristic Marks are not doctrines which are to be accepted on faith or as the result of logical reasoning, but are considered the essential qualities of life as evidenced by daily perceptual and emotional experience. They are: (1) impermanence (*anicca*); (2) unsatisfactoriness, or suffering (*dukkha*); and (3) non-self (*anattā*). The last mark refers not only to the individual but also to all mental and physical phenomena in the universe. Thus, the universe does not consist of self-existing things, but of complex, caused, conditioned phenomena.

The unconditioned, (Pāli) *nibbāna* / (Sanskrit) *nirvāṇa*, is experienced psychologically by means of certain forms of concentration (*samādhi*).

The Four Noble Truths are derived from the same basic ideas. These truths are: (1) suffering (*dukkha*) exists; (2) the cause of suffering is craving (*taṇhā*) and ignorance (*avijjā*); (3) there is an end (*nirodha*) to suffering; and (4) the path or way (*magga*) to the end of suffering is the Noble Eightfold Path, which consists of: (1) right understanding; (2) right intention; (3) right speech; (4) right action; (5) right livelihood; (6) right effort;

(7) right mindfulness; and (8) right concentration.

The first Noble Truth (suffering) is the same as the second Characteristic Mark, the third deals with the cessation of suffering, and the fourth (the path leading to the end of suffering) is mainly concerned with ethics. The second (the cause of suffering) is the most important and contains the nucleus of a complete phenomenology, for, at a very early stage, “suffering” (*dukkha*) became synonymous with life, that is, the world of sense experience, and the second Noble Truth provided the explanation of its origin. The world as experienced by the senses, it may be noted, was the focus of early Buddhism, which had no interest in the origin of the external physical universe.

Primitive Buddhism, though agnostic regarding certain metaphysical problems, was realistically oriented. It believed that there is an external universe closely corresponding to our sense-data, so-called “conventional reality” (*sammuti*), but it realized that the world as we see it is purely subjective, the result of a percipient consciousness (*viññāṇa*) interacting with external sensory stimuli.

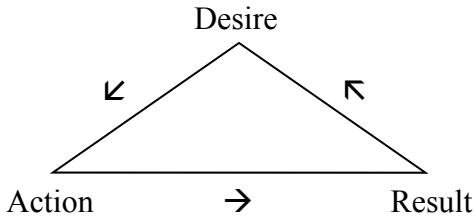
The explanation of the origin, awakening, and development of the percipient consciousness is provided by the doctrine of Conditioned Arising (*paṭicca-samuppāda*). This, though differently interpreted by the various schools of Buddhism, always consists of the following twelve links:

1. Ignorance
2. Volitional formations
3. Consciousness
4. Mind-body
5. Six sense bases
6. Contact
7. Sensations
8. Craving
9. Clinging (attachment)
10. Becoming (conditioned existence)
11. Rebirth
12. Aging, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair

The origin of the percipient consciousness is

ignorance (*avijjā*) and craving (*taṇhā*). Without these, the individual consciousness would disintegrate, and though the experienced world cannot exist without object, it equally cannot exist without subject. Consequently, when an Arahāt (one who has attained deliverance) dies, the experienced world for that person comes to a permanent end. That is to say that it does not continue in another birth.

It can be seen from this that there is a close connection between cause and effect. This law of cause and effect is called “*kamma*” (“*karma*” in Sanskrit), and it is one of the foundational features of Buddhism. Among the numerous explanations of *kamma*, we find the following:



The doctrine of no-self (*anattā*) rejects the belief in the existence of an undying personality, while the doctrine of *kamma*, on the other hand, teaches that our words, thoughts, and deeds have consequences. Accordingly, the early Buddhists taught that the fruit (*phala*) of one's deeds will cause the birth of a new personality after the death of the old. This birth may be in one of the numerous celestial realms or hell realms, or it may be on the earth again.

So-Called “Hinayāna” Buddhism

The philosophy of primitive, or pristine, Buddhism became crystallized in so-called “Hinayāna” Buddhism, the orthodox branch of Buddhism that developed during the period after the death of the Buddha down to about the time of the beginning of the Christian era, after which it had to compete with the newly-developed Mahāyāna. Hinayāna itself was by no means unified, for, shortly after the death of the Buddha, several

independent sects came into being, with widely varying interpretations of the earlier philosophy. Out of the eighteen or so such Hinayāna sects, two only require special attention here. These are, first, the Sthaviravādins (Pāli Theravādins) and, second, the Sarvāstavādins.

The Sthaviravādins, which is the only Hinayāna sect that has survived to the present day, keeps closest to the tenets of early Buddhism, but it soon lost ground in India proper, though it has always maintained itself in Śrī Lanka, Myanmar (Burma), Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand. The Sarvāstavādins were of a more scholastic nature. They transformed Buddhism into a complete and consistent philosophy and wrote in or translated their works into classical Sanskrit, while the more orthodox Sthaviravādins used the more colloquial Pāli. The Sarvāstavādins gained the upper hand in India some time before the beginning of the Christian era, and long remained the dominant school of Indian Buddhism. Most of the Hinayāna works translated into foreign languages, such as Chinese and Tibetan, belonged to this school, and, though, as a separate school, it vanished with the demise of Buddhism in India, it had an enormous influence on the philosophical development of the Mahāyāna. In fact, the Sarvāstavādins may be called “the Hinayāna school *par excellence*”.

Even the more orthodox Sthaviravādin School, which prides itself in its meticulous maintenance of the original teachings of the Buddha, has added several important features. The most essential of which is that, in practice, it has abandoned the agnosticism of the earlier period and, depending upon the fidelity of sense impressions, proceeded to systematize objective phenomena. Thus, for example, it accepted, in a somewhat modified form, the ancient cosmology of India, with its account of the integration and disintegration of the material universe. Where primitive Buddhism had ignored, the Sthaviravādins denied, the existence of an Absolute (no Creator God or Deity). Those metaphysical problems which the early Buddhists had rejected as being irrelevant were answered by the Sthaviravādins, even though the answers were relegated to the body of relative, as opposed to

absolute, truth. The latter consisted only of such doctrines as the Three Characteristic Marks and the Four Noble Truths.

One of the most important steps to be taken was the analysis of the parts of being, approached, in the first place, from the psychological point of view. Early Buddhism had taught that, instead of an ego entity, the personality consisted of five constituent parts, the Five Aggregates (*khandhas*): (1) materiality; (2) feeling; (3) perception; (4) mental formations; and (5) consciousness. The Sthaviravādins divided materiality (*rūpa*) into 28 parts; feeling (*vedanā*) into 3 or 5; perception (*saññā*) into 6; mental factors (*cetasika*) into 52; and consciousness (*citta*) into 89 or 121.

These divisions were the result of introspective analysis, but they were considered absolute and final. These several divisions constituted the unchanging elements (*dhamma*) of existence from which all phenomena are compounded. Buddhism was thus transformed from an agnostic and positivistic system, concerned only with suffering (*dukkha*) and the alleviation of suffering, into a realistic and materialistic philosophy, though the transformation was gradual and could hardly have been recognized at the time, for early Buddhism permitted the analysis of subjective states, and the elements of existence of the Sthaviravādins were enunciated by merely subdividing the divisions of early Buddhism, while maintaining the subjective and psychological point of view.

The Sarvāstavādins were to the Sthaviravādins what the Sthaviravādins were to early Buddhism. The materialism and realism of the Sthaviravādins was made more explicit and categorical by the Sarvāstavādins. The agnostic and psychological aspect was largely lost sight of. Buddhism thus became a definite and rigid philosophical system in the Sarvāstavādin School instead of remaining a body of truths which were effective irrespective of metaphysics. A most important step was made when the elements of existence were classified from an external or objective as well as from a subjective point of view. The older or subjective classification was retained (though the subdivisions of each aggregate [*skandha*] were some-

what different from those of the Sthaviravādins), but the subdivisions were re-arranged in such a way as to constitute a complete analysis of the external universe.

According to the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam* of Vasubandhu, these elements (*dharma*s) are 75 in number, classified as follows:

1. **Unconditioned elements** (*asaṃskṛta dharma*) (simple elements), so-called because they do not enter into combinations with other elements. They are three in number, of which space and *nirvāṇa* are two.
2. **Conditioned elements** (*saṃskṛta dharma*) (complex elements), so-called because they enter into combinations, though themselves simple and permanent. Their compounds constitute the phenomena of the universe. These elements are 72 in number, divided into:
 - A. Material elements, 11 in number;
 - B. Mind, 1 in number;
 - C. Mental qualities, such as love, hate, etc., 46 in number; and
 - D. Miscellaneous elements, such as life, decay, etc., 14 in number.

These elements were considered permanent and unchanging, as were the eighty odd physical elements of the scientists of several generations ago. In their present state, all phenomena were supposed to be impermanent and unstable, but they consisted of stable and unchanging rudiments.

THE TRANSITION FROM HINAYĀNA TO MAHĀYĀNA

In its fully-developed form (the Sarvāstavādin School), the Hinayāna placed great importance upon two doctrines: (1) The necessity for all to strive for Arahātship, that is, for deliverance from the suffering of cyclic existence (*saṃsāra*). (2) All phenomena are unstable compounds made up of a certain fixed number of stable elements.

Neither one of these doctrines can be said to be in strict conformity with the principles of early Buddhism. Regarding the first, in Hinayāna, a distinction *in kind* was made between the Arahāt, one who attained deliverance through following the teachings of another, and the Buddha, who was self-enlightened. More correctly, three distinctions were elaborated: (1) Arahātship; (2) Pacceka Buddhahood, a so-called “private Buddha” — one who attains enlightenment but does not teach; and (3) supreme Buddhahood. According to Hinayāna, not only is there an immense difference between each stage, but, for the average person, the only possible goal is Arahātship. Only one of many millions may aspire to Pacceka Buddhahood, and only one in many eons (*kalpa*) may attain supreme Buddhahood. In primitive Buddhism, on the other hand, little distinction, except one *of degree*, is made between the Buddha and His enlightened disciples, and the highest goal (supreme Buddhahood) is open to all.

Regarding the second point, the simple no-self (*anattā*) doctrine of primitive Buddhism is taken to apply to all parts of the universe, not just to living beings. Every thing, even the components parts of living beings, are in a perpetual flux, or becoming. To be consistent, even the *dhammas*, the fundamental constituents of reality, are considered complex, caused, conditioned, subject to change.

The Mahāyāna took issue with both these doctrines. Though they claimed that their own teachings more perfectly expressed the meaning of the Buddha’s teaching, it must be admitted, however, that this desire for reform resulted only in the formation of a new doctrinal system, which retained something of the spirit but little of the letter of earlier Buddhism. Let us take, for example, the question of the universality of the Buddhahood goal, whereby the distinction in kind between the Buddha and His disciples was reformulated by the Mahāyāna.

The Mahāyāna, appealing as it does to the emotional and devotional elements, regarded the Arahāt ideal as selfish. It was enamored with the idea of self-sacrifice and proclaimed that those who were content with individual liberation or

individual enlightenment might aim only at Arahātship or Pacceka (Pratyeka) Buddhahood, but, instead, that its own followers preferred to abandon these lower aspirations in order that they might become all-saving Buddhas. Once this doctrine had been formulated, great emphasis was placed upon it, and we find many passages in the Mahāyāna scriptures praising this new altruism.

Accordingly, in early Mahāyāna, its followers aspired to become Bodhisattvas, Buddhas-to-be, as opposed to the adherents of the Hinayāna, who were termed “*śravakas*”, or aspirants only after Arahātship.

Later Mahāyāna, the so-called “true Mahāyāna”, carried this idea still further and taught that supreme and perfect enlightenment was the only valid goal for all. The first half of the famous Mahāyāna scripture *The Lotus of the Good Law* (*Saddharma Pundarīka Sūtra*) is devoted to showing that, in reality, there is but one true goal, and that the other goals are but devices (*upāya*) developed by the Buddhas for the purpose of leading the world away from sensuality and materialism.

Strangely enough, however, though opening the doors of Buddhahood to all, Mahāyāna took great pains to exalt and enhance the dignity and power of the Buddhas. In Hinayāna, Buddhas are enlightened human beings, pure and simple, while, in Mahāyāna, they are looked upon as divine incarnations or as material manifestations of the Universal Buddha Principle, the existence of which the Mahāyāna gradually came to teach.

In Hinayāna Suttas, discourses are delivered by Śākyamuni Buddha, generally speaking, in simple and unaffected prose in order to make the listeners feel the presence of a wise and serene Teacher, advising them how to overcome the vicissitudes of life, as One who has just emerged victorious Himself. In Mahāyāna Sūtras, on the other hand, we find a mysterious and transcendental being far removed from the levels of ordinary humanity, who is listened to and worshipped by countless hordes of beings, celestial, human, and demonic, who shower flowers upon the Sage while He performs stupendous supernatural deeds. In the

Saddharma Pundarīka Sūtra, for example, the Buddha sits for long ages in meditation. He is the Supreme Ruler, who has Himself led countless thousands to enlightenment during countless ages and who never really dies and who is never really born. The only explanation to this is that Śākya-muni and all the other Buddhas are one, all are manifestations of the Universal Buddha Principle.

MAHĀYĀNA BUDDHISM IN INDIA

The religious aspects of Mahāyāna developed sometime immediately prior to the Christian era, but its philosophical aspects were formulated during the period extending from the first to the fifth centuries CE. Two main schools came to be differentiated. One was the Mādhyamika School, founded by Nāgārjuna and Aryadeva in the first and second centuries CE. The other was the Yogācāra School, founded by Vasubandhu and Asaṅga in the fourth century CE.

The Mādhyamika School largely devoted itself to the consideration of the second point on which the Mahāyāna claimed that Hinayāna had departed from the original teaching — the question of the existence of certain permanent stable elements which composed the universe. In propounding this doctrine, Hinayāna, as mentioned above, almost abandoned the doctrine of change and becoming. In Mādhyamika philosophy, a return was made to the principle of the universality of change and impermanence.

The basis of this undeveloped, or early, Mahāyāna is *śūnyatā*, literally, “emptiness” or “voidness”. This doctrine has been frequently totally misunderstood in the West and taken to mean the theory of non-existence of the universe or purely nihilistic idealism. In reality, *śūnyatā* is simply an insistence that all things have no self-existence, that they are compounds, unstable entities even in their elemental stage. Currently, science holds that the supposedly rigid physical particles of classical physics are not permanent, that they can be broken down, that the particles are themselves compounds possessing the essential qualities of change and

decay. Likewise, the *śūnyatā* school maintains that the *dharmas* (“elements”) are impermanent and have no existence unto themselves, that they may be broken down into parts, parts into sub-parts, and so on and so forth. Accordingly, all phenomena have a relative, as opposed to an absolute, existence. All of life, all mental and physical phenomena, was once more viewed as an ever-changing flux, a stream of existence involved in an everlasting process of becoming.

In a word, then, the Mādhyamika doctrine of *śūnyatā* is that there is no thing-unto-itself, nothing with inherent or self existence, nothing that is not involved in an endless process of change. All things can be broken down until we reach the great transcendent reality which is so absolute that it is wrong to say that it is or that it is not. This underlying reality — the principle of eternal relativity, non-infinity — permeates all mental and physical phenomena, allowing expansion, growth, change, and evolution, which would otherwise be impossible. Though the Mādhyamika doctrine tells us that all phenomena are nothing other than a constantly changing flux or stream, it tells us little or nothing about the nature of this stream.

The next stage of doctrinal development, as represented by the Yogācāra School (also known as the “Cittamātra” or “Vijñānavāda”), was a very significant one and resulted in the formulation of a remarkably complete system of idealism. In this school, the stream of life was supposed to be the mind, a fundamental mind substance that was permanent and yet ever-changing, like the ocean. From this, all the elements (the 75 elements of the earlier school become 100 in the Yogācāra School) and, therefore, all phenomena are derived. It was called the “*ālaya vijñāna*”, the “storehouse” or “repository consciousness”, yet it was considered to be neither matter nor mind, but the basic energy that was at the root of both.

It is the imperceptible and unknowable noumenon behind all phenomena. To quote Kuroda: “In contradistinction to the fallacious phenomena of existence there is the true Essence of Mind. The Essence of Mind is the entity without ideas and without phenomena and is

always the same. It pervades all things, and is pure and unchanging ... so it is called *Bhūta-tathatā* — permanent reality.”

It would be easy to exaggerate the importance of this doctrine and falsely to identify it with more developed systems, but, undoubtedly, it has many points of contact with certain phases of modern Western philosophy. The *ālaya vijñāna* is like the “*élan de vie*” of Henri Bergson (1859—1941), the “energy” of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz (1646—1716), or the “unconscious” of Eduard Von Hartmann (1842—1906). Like the last, though, it is the essence of consciousness — it is not itself conscious in its earlier stages. It is mental, and yet, there is a certain objective reality about it. Each unit of life may be regarded as a vortex in the sea of life. The action and interaction of these units, one with another and with the common stream, brings about the phenomenal appearance of the universe.

Accordingly, the *ālaya vijñāna* is regarded in three aspects: (1) as active, as the seed of percipient consciousness; (2) as passive, as that which can be sensed or perceived by consciousness; and (3) as the *object of false belief*, inasmuch as, being the root of self-consciousness, each person comes to regard himself or herself as a permanent, eternal ego entity.

THE EARLY MAHĀYĀNA OF CHINA AND JAPAN

Buddhism was introduced into China in the first century CE, and was firmly established by the fourth century. It was introduced into Japan in the sixth century CE, and was firmly established there in the seventh. The important sects of Indian Buddhism were introduced into both of those countries, and, therefore, we find a Bidon or Kusha sect corresponding to the Sarvāstivādin School, a Sanron sect corresponding to the Mādhyamika School, and a Hosso sect corresponding to the Yogācāra School. These were all overshadowed, however, by a number of schools which developed in China and Japan itself. In these schools, two phases may be distinguished, an earlier and

theoretical or philosophical phase, and a later or practical and religious phase.

The early or philosophical phase is best represented by the two schools of Tendai and Kegon. The Tendai School is, in some ways, a further development of the Mādhyamika School, and the Kegon of the Yogācāra, but both are synthetic philosophies and have borrowed largely from all available sources. The doctrines of the two schools closely resemble each other, differing chiefly on points of emphasis, so that, for the time being, they may be considered together.

Their most valuable contribution to Buddhist philosophy was the development of the idea of the Absolute, which was latent in both the Mādhyamika and Yogācāra Schools. The Essence of Mind, or the Sea of Life, is regarded as the one fundamental reality. It alone can be said to have permanent existence, all phenomena being merely ephemeral manifestations of it. It is frequently called the “Middle Principle”, since it transcends both Being and Becoming. Chinese Mahāyānists answer the question of Being and Becoming by the simile of the ocean. The ocean is the Absolute, the waves are life’s phenomena. The ocean is always changing. Waves are constantly arising, and no two waves are ever alike. In like manner, the stream of life goes ever surging past, never remaining the same. Yet, there is a certain stability, a certain being, a fixity, a changelessness in the very changeability.

The doctrine of the Absolute in most Western philosophies is based upon the idea of pure Being. The Mahāyāna doctrine of the Absolute (*Bhūta-tathatā*) evolved from the idea of becoming, and the two doctrines are strangely similar. In both, the Absolute is sufficient reason for the universe; it is the principle of existence which transcends but includes matter and mind, life and death, sameness and difference, *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. The *Bhūta-tathatā* of Mahāyāna is the norm of life, the acme of being, the warp and the woof of the universe. It comes close to Georg Wilhelm Hegel’s (1770—1831) conception of the Absolute, inasmuch as it is not only the force behind evolution, but also the very process of evolution itself.

Retaining, as Chinese Mahāyāna does, the conception that all existence is derived from the *ālaya vijñāna* (“storehouse consciousness”) which, in turn, has its essence and supporting principle in the *Bhūtatathatā*, it declares that the Absolute is both identical and non-identical with the material universe. It is, to cite the ocean simile again, as if the water were stirred up by the winds of ignorance whereby the waves are produced. The water, therefore, is both identical and non-identical with the waves. Better stated, the Universe is but a mode of the Universal.

Early Mahāyāna systems had formulated the doctrine that every Buddha has three bodies: (1) the *Dharmakāya*, the “body of the great order”, the true nature of the Buddha, which is identical with transcendental reality; (2) the *Sambhogakāya*, the “enjoyment body”, the body of the *buddhas* who, while in a “Buddha-Paradise”, enjoy the truth that they embody; and (3) the *Nirmānakāya*, the “manifestation body”, the earthly body in which *buddhas* appear to mankind in order to fulfill their resolve to guide all beings to liberation. In developed Mahāyāna Buddhism, the *Bhūtatathatā* is regarded as sort of Universal Buddha. Accordingly, it was likewise considered to be possessed of three bodies, so that we find, in the later stages, an idea quite similar to that of the Christian Trinity. The *Dharmakāya* corresponds to an impersonalized God the Father, the abstract order of the universe, the Unmanifested Deity, while the *Sambhogakāya* represents a more personalized ideation of the Absolute, the symbol of moral perfection and the object of devotion, and the *Nirmānakāya* is similar to the Christian “God the Son”, or the Absolute as manifested in the world in the guise of a human Buddha.

THE LATER MAHĀYĀNA OF CHINA AND JAPAN

The later schools of Chinese and Japanese Buddhism are not so much doctrinal developments as various adaptations of the philosophical foundations discussed above. The most important sects were the Shingon, or Mantrā, Sect, the Chan, or

Zen, Sect, and the Jōdo, or Sukhāvati (Pure Land), Sect. All of them accepted the older philosophical foundations but gave them a religious and, to a large extent, mystical bias.

The Shingon School claims to be the hidden or esoteric doctrine of which all outward exoteric doctrines are but symbols. The full truth, or inner mysteries, are revealed only to those who have been initiated into the order. For the uninitiated, the Shingon speaks only in terms of parables and symbols. The Absolute and the various aspects of the Absolute are represented as celestial Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, each one with a mystical name, form, color, and sign, each represented by a certain sound. The *Bhūtatathatā* itself, as a whole, is generally represented as Vairocana, or the “Sun Buddha”. The noumenal aspect of the universe is called the “Diamond World”; the phenomenal aspect, the “Womb World”; and sacred charts or circles (*maṇḍala*) are drawn illustrating the nature, attributes, and relations of each. The Shingon Sect corresponds very closely to the Lamaism of Tibet and Mongolia. Both are derived from the later phases of the Yogācāra Sect in India, about the sixth century CE, when esoteric practices (*tantra*) became rampant in both Hindu and Buddhist circles.

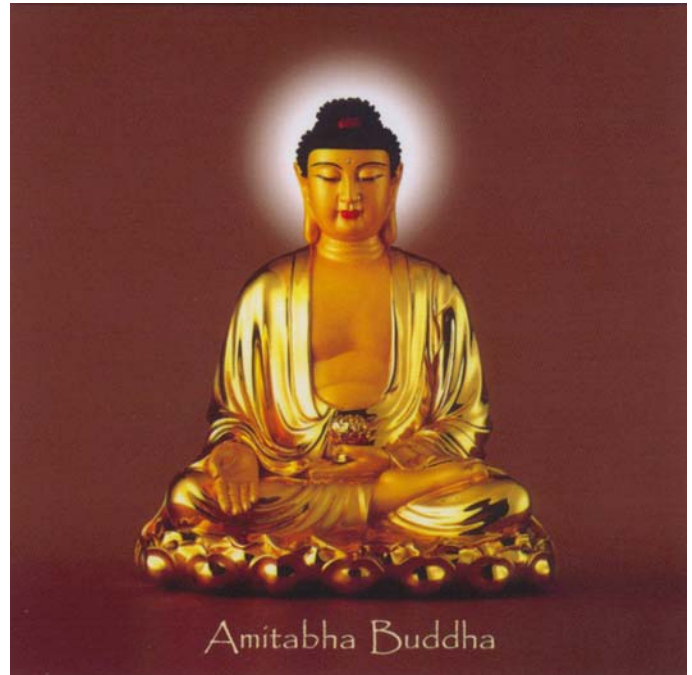
The Chan, or Zen, School represents a different type of esotericism or mysticism. The basic idea of Chan is that all formulated doctrines, whether exoteric or esoteric, all books, all speech, and even all thought are inadequate to express the full nature of absolute truth. Consequently, Chan refuses to place complete credence in any one book or collection of books. It refuses to tie itself to any specific doctrine. It accepts the philosophy of the Tendai and Kegon Schools from a relative point of view, but insists that absolute truth must be found by each person for himself or herself by means of intuition realization to be gained through meditation. The only definite teaching to be found in the Chan Sect is that every person is possessed of the *bodhicitta* (the “heart of wisdom”), or the seed of Buddhahood. Everyone is a potential Buddha. Thus, a person has but to awaken his or her *Bodhicitta* by meditation for him or her to gain a direct

insight into the nature of reality. The Chan sect was founded in China by Bodhidharma in the sixth century CE, and was established in Japan by Eisai in 1191 CE.

The Sukhāvati doctrine, more particularly as represented by the Shin Sect, the reformed or “new school” branch of Mahāyāna Buddhism, may be called the “mysticism of exclusive adoration”. In this school, the Absolute or Universal Buddha is symbolized as Amitābha, the “Buddha of Infinite Light”, or Amitāyus, the “Buddha of Infinite Time”, and, as such, is the object of fervent devotion. Enlightenment, or *nirvāṇa*, or Buddhahood is symbolized by the Paradise Sukhāvati (Pure Land), or Jōdo, of Amitābha. Rebirth in this paradise is to be gained by selfless adoration of the supreme. In early days, Amitābha may have been regarded as a historical Buddha, and his paradise a place to be gained by death, but, in the later phases of the Chinese and, especially, Japanese traditions, Amitābha is without beginning and without end and is but a symbol for an inexpressible reality, and rebirth into his paradise is nothing more than the awakening of the *bodhicitta* here on earth, and this *bodhicitta* is to be awakened by love and by faith. As an aside, it may be noted that Sukhāvati Buddhism may have been influenced by Nestorian Christianity.

At the present time, both Chinese and Japanese Buddhism are dominated by the Zen and Jōdo sects — Zen being an embodiment of absolute truth for the educated and Jōdo its relative symbol for the majority of people. ■

Adapted from the Introduction, “The Doctrinal Evolution of Buddhism”, pp. 1—31, of *An Introduction to Mahāyāna Buddhism (with especial Reference to Chinese and Japanese Phases)* by William Montgomery McGovern (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, and Trubner & Co., Ltd. / New York, NY: E. P. Dutton and Co. [1922]) (available in PDF format as a free download from Google Books). In preparing the version of this work for inclusion in the September 2011 Charleston Buddhist Fellowship newsletter, *Ahimsā*, material was taken from several different sources, especially *The Encyclopedia of Eastern Philosophy and Religion: Buddhism, Taoism, Zen, Hinduism. A Complete Survey of the Teachers, Traditions, and Literature of Asian Wisdom* (Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications [1989]).



Buddhism and Science

Until the beginning of the nineteenth century, Buddhism was confined to countries untouched by modern science. Nonetheless, from the beginning, Buddhism has always been receptive to scientific thinking.

One reason why the Teachings of the Buddha can easily be embraced by those accustomed to scientific thinking is that the Buddha did not base His Teachings on faith but on experience.

Another reason is that the scientific spirit can be found in the Buddha’s approach to spiritual Truth. The Buddha’s method for discovering and testing spiritual Truth is similar to that of the scientist. A scientist observes the external world objectively and proposes a theory only after many successful experiments have been conducted.

Using a similar approach, the Buddha observed the inner world with detachment and encouraged His disciples not to accept any teaching until they had critically investigated and verified its truthfulness for themselves. Just as a scientist does not claim that his experiments cannot be duplicated by others, the Buddha does not claim that His enlightenment cannot be achieved by others. ■

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